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Do Gambling Game Choices Reflect a Recreational Gambler's Motivations?

ABSTRACT

Purpose: Gambling is increasingly a global phenomenon, derided by some as exploitative and viewed by others as entertainment. Despite extensive research into gambling motivations, previous research has not assessed whether gaming choice is a function of one's personal motivations or simply a desire to gamble in general, regardless of game choice among recreational gamblers. We explore this theme by considering "illusion of control" where luck and skill may mediate gambling motivation.

Design/methodology/approach: This study applies two motivation theories: Hedonic Consumption Theory (HCT) and Motivation Disposition Theory (MDT), as well as examining heuristic perspectives related to gambling. Three stages of qualitative data collection were undertaken.

Findings: Our findings indicate that for recreational gamblers, gaming choice is a function of personal motives. Hence, gamblers chose games that reflect their needs or motives, focusing on the game or games that best allow them to achieve their goals and desires.

Research limitations/implications: These findings shed light on an important topic and include an in-depth examination of recreational gamblers' motivations. Further quantitative examinations should be considered.

Practical Implications: This research could be used by practitioners or researchers in better segmenting the casino recreational gambling market.

Originality/value: While many researchers have examined gambling motivations and even gambling motivations by venue (e.g., casino versus online), few researchers have focused on gamblers' choice of games and even fewer have studied recreational gamblers' motivations with

a qualitatively rich approach, resulting in some useful perspectives on drivers of recreational gamblers by personal motives.

Keywords: Recreational gambling, illusion of control, motivation, Hedonic Consumption Theory, Motive Disposition Theory

Article Classification: Research Paper

Do Gambling Game Choices Reflect a Recreational Gambler's Motivations?

Gambling, as a market, has become a global phenomenon ranging from casinos to sports betting to internet websites. In 2011, the worldwide gambling market produced \$419 billion in revenues, with over two-thirds of this revenue coming from overseas, with 27.7% of this revenue estimated to come from casino gambling (GBGC, 2012). Such is the popularity of gambling, in 2007 the United States of America gross gambling revenue, the amount wagered minus the amount returned to players, for all legal gaming was \$92.27 billion with \$37.52 billion accounted for by casino gambling (the highest amount ever recorded) (American Gaming Association, 2010). Although that number has decreased in recent years due to recessionary factors, current predictions suggest an upward trend, with slightly over one third of the population indicating that they had gambled in a casino in the past year (American Gaming Association, 2013a; RubinBrown, 2015). However, casinos are not the only gambling revenue generators. Although illegal or dormant in all US states, bar Nevada and Delaware, sports gambling is increasing in popularity (American Gaming Association, 2013b). While legal sports wagering in the US was \$3.45 billion in 2012, illegal wagers may be as high as \$380 billion, which could represent the largest gambling activity in the US (American Gaming Association 2013b).

Why do people choose to gamble? Cotte (1997) suggests that gambling motivations fall into three basic groupings: economic, symbolic, and hedonic or pleasure seeking. Other researchers suggest gamblers' motivations lie in a desire to enhance self-esteem and to escape the monotony of daily life (Lee et al., 2006; Loro, 2004). Additional gambling motivation studies focus on a particular type of gambling (Thomas, Allen, and Phillips, 2009; Lee et al., 2006), or compare differences in motivations by age (Hope and Havir, 2002), gender (McDaniel and Zuckerman, 2003; Potenza, Maciejewski, and Mazure, 2006), religiosity (Coulter, Hermans and Parker 2013)

venue (Cotte and LaTour, 2009) or type of gambler (recreational versus pathological or problem gambler) (Back, Lee, and Stinchfield, 2010). The few studies focusing on gambling and game choice tend to focus solely on motivation from a social interaction or competitive perspective (e.g., Fang and Mowen, 2009; Lam, 2007; Mowen et al., 2009).

Furthermore, much of the focus on gambling motivations is on pathological (addictive) gambling (Cotte, 1997; Rachlin, 1990). Understanding gambling motivations relative to problem and/or addictive gambling is evolving as the fields of psychiatry and neuroscience focus on understanding addictive mechanisms and their relationship with high-risk decision-making (Clark et al., 2013). For example, clinicians no longer categorize pathological gambling as an impulse control disorder but as a behavioral addiction, making it similar to substance abuse even though it is unrelated to acute or chronic exposure effects (Nutt, et al., 2015; Wiehler and Peters, 2015). Additionally, Wiehler and Peters (2015) find that while pathological gamblers are different from non-pathological gamblers on reward based decision-making, addiction severity of pathological gamblers “does not appear to be a reliable indicator of task performance” (pg. 9). This suggests that all pathological gamblers, regardless of addiction level, have different evaluations of risk versus reward than non-pathological gamblers. While this differentiation between pathological and non-pathological gambling and decision-making is interesting, pathological gambling is believed to represent less than 3% of all gamblers (Kessler et al., 2008).

While pathological gambling is a useful topic to pursue, our focus in this paper is on the other 97% of gamblers, which we categorize as recreational gamblers. We have three questions of interest relative to recreational gamblers’ game choices. First, do they choose games that reflect themselves, i.e., their personal motivations or needs, or are they simply motivated to gamble regardless of the game they play? Second, these studies tend to ignore the intrinsic role of

perceived control (as affected by one's illusion of control) influencing motivational gambling choice. Illusion of control is the tendency for human beings to believe they can control or at least influence outcomes when in fact they have little or no control over them (Langer 1975). Illusion of control represents an unrealistic view of one's control in a situation, i.e., one's perceived control over events in one's life (see Psychology Glossary, 2016). It then raises the question, how does one's illusion of control temper or motivate gamblers to play games involving greater skill, such as poker, compared to non-skilled based games that rely more on luck, such as slot machines? Finally, to what extent can and does a gambler's illusion of control moderate his or her gambling motivation? That is, to what extent can a gambler recognize and control his or her gambling motivation when the chance of winning, for whatever reason, appears low?

In this paper, we address these questions using an understanding of heuristics, as well as two relevant motivations theories, Hedonic Consumption Theory (HCT) and Motivation Disposition Theory (MDT), with the goal of understanding gambling motivations and perceptions of control among casino (cards and slot machines) and sports gamblers. We examine game choices that require varying levels of social interaction, financial investment and most importantly, varying levels of luck and skill. We come to understand gambling motivations and perceptions of control experienced relative to game choice. Our paper extends existing research that has often tended to present gambling motivations as invariable regardless of the venue or type of gaming (Mizerski et al., 2013; Thomas, Allen, and Phillips, 2009).

Our paper offers many contributions. First, we extend understanding of gambling motivations by drawing on Hedonic Consumption Theory and Motivation Disposition Theory. While these two theories have been under-utilized within gambling research, we believe that they offer important insights into the topic. Second, by applying heuristics to gambling we extend Fang and

Mowen (2009), Lam (2007), and Mowen et al.'s (2009) research into game choice in gambling, which focuses on winning, social interaction, escaping from problems, and/or self-esteem enhancement as reasons to gamble. Instead, by applying gambling motivation research, we show how perceptions of control influence gamblers' desires in gaming choices.

To address our research questions, we undertook a three-stage qualitative data collection process involving gamblers who gamble primarily for recreational purposes, while to some extent, making money or hitting the jackpot is still generally an obvious underlying motive, as well. To explore these themes, we differentiated gambling game choice into low- vs. high- skill games. Low-skill games are those games that require minimal to no skill to participate in with a perceived belief in the gambler needing luck to win. We identified low-skill games with slot machines. In contrast, high-skilled games require a greater knowledge to participate in the game and greater skill involvement. The more skilled the player, the greater his or her chances of winning against less skilled opponents or the house, such as the casino. We identified high-skilled games with card games, such as Texas hold'em poker and sports betting. Hence, low- vs. high-skill gambling game choices offer a means to understand how a gambler's perceptions of luck and skill, among other reasons, reflect his or her gambling motivations.

A key theme emerging from these interviews was a keen awareness of the differing gaming motivations, which were partially influenced by participants' differing needs, motives, skills, and desires, but also by their beliefs in how luck and skill mediate their gaming choice.

THEORY

Heuristics within gaming choice and the role of luck and skill

We locate gambling choice within a heuristic perspective, a term describing simple strategies based upon previous experience that individuals use to solve a problem (Ippoliti, 2015).

Individuals use heuristics when they are unable to find a perfect solution to a problem and need an easier way to help make decisions. From a gambling perspective, individuals use heuristics to inform gambling judgements and to minimize uncertainty. Wagenaar (1988, p. 116-7) suggests that “gamblers gamble, not because they have a bigger repertoire of heuristics, but because they select heuristics at the wrong occasions.” Although Wagenaar (1988) identified 16 different gambling heuristics, one heuristic is particularly pertinent to this research—the illusion of control. This heuristic is “... a tendency to believe that there is a greater probability of obtaining a chance-determined outcome than would be dictated solely by random chance” (Toneatto, 1999, p. 1594). Within the illusion of control, we identify three inter-related gambling beliefs - a gambler's fallacy, a hot hand, and stock of luck.

An individual with a gambler's fallacy wrongly believes that after a set of outcomes in a gambling game an opposite outcome is more likely to occur. This belief is wrong due to the mathematical probabilities of certain cards being chosen or revealed. Further, a belief in a hot hand involves the situation in which the gambler feels that his predictions of a gambling outcome are supported by his winning on each turn based on his abilities to predict what happens next. This belief is often supported by the gambler's belief that his or her gambling “skills” have allowed him or her to win (Sundali and Croson, 2006). Thus, Langer (1975) identifies a hot hand with the idea of one having an illusion of control (i.e., control that may not actually exist).

The gambler's belief in a hot hand is indicative of a belief in his gambling skills (whether realistic or not). Skill in gambling, defined here as the ability to undertake a gambling activity well and often involving some form of strategy, has been previously identified with gambling success (Gupta and Derevensky, 1998). For example, Langer (1975) noted how gamblers believe they can influence events, while Dixon (2012) and Rogers (1998) indicate that gamblers may

falsely believe that they are more skillful in picking winning lottery or roulette numbers than in using randomly selected ones. Langer (1975) adds that when individuals experience issues of competition, choice, familiarity, and involvement in chance situations, such as in gambling, they are prone to an illusion of control. A gambler experiencing this illusion may more heavily weigh his perceived skill into his potential to win. However, perceived skill is composed of both real skills (based on past learning, experience, and knowledge gained in the process of educating oneself on game strategy), as well as a false sense of security based on overconfidence in this skill. Obviously, high-skill games (such as poker) provide players with an opportunity to use more “real skills” than other betting situations where low-skill games are based almost entirely on luck (e.g., slots), but these skilled gamblers also still get caught up in the illusion of control being unable to differentiate clearly between skill-based winning and luck-based winning. Why? Langer (1975) argues that when individuals experience issues of competition, choice, familiarity, and involvement in chance situations, such as in gambling, they are prone to the illusion of control. A gambler experiencing these issues then makes an assessment on his/her chances of winning based on their estimated probability of winning, and then attributes his or her gambling success to his/her own skill and luck.

Sundali and Croson (2006) note that the opposite of a hot hand is a ‘stock of luck,’ where gamblers believe they have a limited amount (stock) of luck to help them win. Once the gambler uses up this stock of luck, they believe they are more likely to lose. Stock of luck may allow gamblers to feel in control more easily and thus walk away when their luck starts to turn. Luck within gambling holds that some event or action can directly affect a gambling outcome (Wohl and Enzle, 2002; Wohl and Enzle, 2003) and can be attributed to two reasons. First, luck as a social construct, which is unstable and unpredictable, arises from environmental conditions that

themselves have arisen by chance (Heider, 1958; Weiner et al., 1971) with no relation to future success (Darke and Freedman, 1997). Thus, an individual experiencing success, where the individual has minimal responsibility, is likely to attribute his or her success externally to luck. Alternatively, the second explanation for luck identifies luck as a stable and internal attribute within an individual, often producing feelings of control, confidence, and belief in one's success (Darke and Freedman, 1997). For example, Keren and Wagenaar's (1985) study of poker players indicates that 45% of their sample perceived luck to be the most important factor in winning compared to skill (37%) and chance (18%).

In both instances, a belief in luck is indicative of an irrational belief leading to either negative or positive outcomes (Xu and Harvey, 2014). An inherent belief in one's luck at gambling, identified with a negative outcome, is where an individual attributes his or her gambling losses to external influences. For example, a player may believe that another player or the dealer is giving off negative thoughts that affect his/her playing. Researchers often identify this externalization of negative outcomes with problem gambling (Darke and Freedman, 1997). These perspectives on luck and illusion of control will aid us further in our qualitative work to follow.

Hedonic Consumption Theory and Motivation Disposition Theory

As insights and themes emerged from the qualitative analysis undertaken here, the researchers sought theories that might fit the emerging data. Previous motivational theories tend to focus on problem gambling, consequently only offering limited insights into recreational gambling motivations and game choices. Since we focus on gaming choice (low skill vs. high skill) as a function of personal motivations in this paper, we turned to motivational theories to aid us in understanding the topic. Two theories appear particularly applicable and tend to complement each other— Hedonic Consumption Theory (HCT) and Motive Disposition Theory (MDT).

Hedonic Consumption Theory (HCT) focuses on intrinsic motivators or behaviors that influence an individual's experience with products or services, in this case, gambling (Holbrook et al., 1984). This theory argues that individuals do things for the joy of doing them (i.e., internal rewards) rather than for possible external rewards (e.g. winning) (Csikszentmihalyi, 1975). An important intrinsic reward is play whose essence includes "satisfaction, enjoyment, fun, and other hedonic aspects of the consumption experience" (Holbrook et al., 1984, p. 729). Gambling has long been associated with play, thus this theory is highly useful here. For example, Lam's (2007) study on differentiating gaming types based on social versus excitement/winning motives lends itself to an HCT focus. Here, Lam (2007) found that certain groups, including casino gamblers, focused more on excitement and challenge while social aspects were a strong motivation for other gamblers, such as card room and bingo gamblers.

However, few gambling studies apply HCT to explore gambling motives relative to types of games chosen. One exception is Titz, Andrus, and Miller's (2012) study of table players versus slot players. These researchers note that all recreational gamblers in their study, regardless of game preference, derived pleasure from the activity and exhibited discipline in their gambling spending. They found some differences between gamers, with table players striving to improve more while focusing less on getting away from their problems than slot players. Yet, this study failed to consider whether gamblers are motivated to choose a game that reflects the player's needs or whether the complexity or joy of the game attracts the gamer. This omission has important implications to gambling motivation.

In contrast, researchers do not appear to have used Motivation Disposition Theory (MDT) to explore gambling motivations. MDT posits that various motivations represent inherent needs within individuals to seek out a desired state. Here we define desired state as a particular

outcome that motivates an individual to achieve that goal. MDT stresses that what motivates an individual differs among and between individuals according to three dimensions—needs for achievement, affiliation, and power. These dimensions, we argue, can be associated with various gambling motivations. The need for achievement, in conjunction with a need for excellence, can be associated with gambling behaviors and self-esteem (Lee et al., 2006; Loro, 2004), while affiliation is associated with the need for social interactions, previously identified with gambling motivations (Kinnunen and Mäyrä, 2014; Lee et al., 2006) as well as with escaping the monotony of daily life (Loro, 2004). Finally, the need for power may be associated with a need to be acknowledged by others (Winter, 1973) or even excitement (Platz and Millar, 2001). We now turn to our methodology and findings.

METHOD

Considering the relative novelty of the questions asked here and a need to understand the results in depth, we undertook a three-stage qualitative approach. This approach allowed us to study recreational gamblers' motives, needs, feelings of control, and luck/skill perceptions in some depth.

Stage one consisted of short interviews with gamblers in situ at three casino resorts in the southeastern United States (Biloxi, New Orleans, and Tunica). Extensive field notes accompanied these interviews aimed at gathering textual data about the setting, actions, actors, and gambling motivations. In each location, the researchers visited at least three casinos. The researchers engaged approximately 25 individual gamblers in short conversations relative to their gambling interests and motivations, taking extensive notes and later comparing them.

Stages two and three involved interviews aimed at obtaining understanding as to participants' gambling perspectives, with the interviews taking on a phenomenological focus (Thompson,

Locander, and Pollio, 1989). As this research focuses on gaming choices and the reasons for these choices, the researchers focused on several important topics, after obtaining a general understanding about the person and their life: “Tell us about your gambling habits and preferences and why do you do what you do relative to gambling.” These ‘grand tour’ style questions led further into a discussion about participants’ gambling experiences (McCracken, 1998). The discussion centered on: their reasons for gambling, how and why they first began gambling, their emotional and familial connections to gambling, their choice of gambling options and reasoning, and the effects of winning or losing on them at the time and in future behavior, among other related issues.

In stage two, the researchers conducted 14 individual depth interviews (IDIs) with a convenience sample of gamblers from seven states, as well as with a bookie. This stage of the data collection provided an initial understanding of gambling motivations and favored games. Participants were recruited either because they were known to the researchers as gamblers or by using a snowball technique. The researchers conducted the interviews by phone or in person (their homes or places of employment) with either one or two interviewers present. The interviews lasted 30 to 45 minutes. Participants varied in their occupational and socio-economic backgrounds, regardless of their favored gambling game (see Table 1). These interviews served two purposes: 1) they aided in the development of the next stage of the research, e.g., critical themes to explore and 2) they were combined with the final stage transcripts to aid in the development of the findings.

Tables 1 and 2 about here

The final stage included 17 usable informants who lived and gambled in Las Vegas. An advertisement in Craigslist aimed at ‘frequent gamblers’ was used to recruit respondents. Three

advertisements were posted (one general call, one targeting women and another targeting sports gamblers), which provided contact details for one of the authors and the names of the universities conducting the research. Initially an online questionnaire screened interested parties, which served three purposes. First, questions drawn from Gamblers Anonymous (2012) identified potential problem gamblers. For example, ‘Did you ever gamble to get money with which to pay debts or otherwise solve financial difficulties?’ and ‘Has gambling ever made your home life unhappy?’ Second, applicants could self-identify their level and type of gambling. Finally, this approach insured a good mix of genders and gambling preferences. The researchers then contacted those individuals fitting the desired criteria, attempting to avoid “problem gamblers,” and invited a set of targeted individuals to participate in our interviews at a casino meeting room in Las Vegas.

A male and female team conducted the interviews in a conference room in a Las Vegas casino. Having both interviewers in the room allowed informants to feel as if they were in a conversation with several interested people, encouraging them to talk freely about their gambling motivations and behaviors. At the beginning of the interviews, participants were advised of the confidentiality and ability to withdraw at any point, as well as provided with a list of gambling support services if they experienced any dissonance from the interview. At the end of the interviews, the researchers thanked participants and gave them \$50 for their participation. Interviews lasted 45 to 55 minutes. After each interview, the researchers discussed the interview and wrote field notes, reflecting on the interviews at the end of the day. This approach encouraged triangulation and an understanding of the gamblers’ perspectives (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

The researchers transcribed verbatim the interviews from stages two and three, analyzing them using a hermeneutic procedure (Thompson, 1997). This approach commenced with an intra-interview strategy where all three researchers independently and repeatedly read each interview to gain an understanding of the data. Each researcher then made his or her own notes, including thoughts and observations on a per interview basis. The second stage involved an inter-interview strategy where the researchers focused on comparing emerging patterns of similarity and differences across the data. This process was repeated to allow initial readings to inform later readings, as well as later readings to illuminate earlier readings. The researchers then compared these insights to their field notes and with the interviews from the previous data stage collection. Through this process, a thematic text reflecting a broad understanding of the interview data emerged.

To ensure the validity of the data, the researchers wrote up several interviews as case studies and sent them to the participants to gauge the accuracy of the researchers' interpretations. This approach, referred to as member checking (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), provides an opportunity to explore participants' reactions to the researchers' interpretations. None of the contacted participants disagreed with these interpretations.

FINDINGS

It isn't always about winning; it's all about the "game"

For most participants, a key outcome from their gambling game choice, but not necessarily a dominant motivator to gamble, was winning money. One clear motivator as Henry explained was for the excitement or thrill of it, which is consistent with looking at gambling as play, serving as an important intrinsic motive (consistent with Hedonic Consumption Theory):

I think part of it [gambling] is the excitement and opportunity to win. The chance to win from not doing anything and thinking that you are smarter than the system and that you are smarter than everybody else.

Yet what constituted winning for participants varied widely. For slot machine players, winning often meant breaking even and leaving the casino without any financial loss, a behavior reminiscent of the earlier discussion on “stock of luck.” Julie summed up many slot machine gamblers’ perspective of winning, describing opportunities to win in terms of hope more so than a realistic outcome:

Oh, I don't think I'm going to win, not big, but of course I would love to but I've never hit those three sevens, you know and I hardly ever, ever do a max bet... I guess it's like that one little bit of hope that you think might be able to have more and help more, take care of your obligations, a little more people too.

Slot machine playing also offered participants a chance to escape at least temporarily from the perceived drudgery or reality of their lives. Reflective of Lee et al. (2006) and Lorez (2004), slot machine gambling offered an hour or two for an individual to feel good about himself, especially if things at home were not so great. For example, Marcy and Kacey talked about their challenging home environments (multiple occupants, being around children all day, or looking for better employment). Consider Kacey’s comment on slot machine playing:

...to get away from my life. To run away from my life for a minute. Run away from home. I gotta run away from home for about half an hour and I run down to you know [her local convenience store]...Just to get hopeful; I can clean those dishes when I get back.

Other slot-machine players recognized gambling as a place to socialize and be entertained. Slot machines acted as a medium to engage with others, share stories of winning and losing or to experience a sociable communal space, reminiscent of findings by Kinnunen and Mäyrä (2014) and Lee et al. (2006). Arthur offers a typical example. For him, gambling on slot machines or Keno provided a social experience: “Sometimes when you’re just playing and you sit down next to someone that likes to chat like you. So next thing you’re playing and you’re in a conversation and I like that.”

In contrast, those participants who primarily engaged with sports betting or card games clearly defined winning as making money but often for different reasons. Participants, (e.g., Duane and Andy) who engaged in sports gambling, viewed their gaming activity and the chance to win as part of a wider social engagement, with a high degree of achievement for accomplishing a goal involved. A key determinant in this difference was access to sports gambling. For those participants who lived outside of Nevada where sports gambling is illegal, sports gambling was undertaken discretely (often with a bookie operating under the law) and experienced as a social gathering with friends. Here participants did not appear to show any gambling heuristics, such as gamblers’ fallacy, hot hand, or stock of luck. Sports betting was used to widen social engagement opportunities, as well as to demonstrate one’s knowledge or skills. For example, Duane, a banker from Alabama, viewed his sports gambling as an opportunity to engage with his friends, express his knowledge and get insights from them:

...on Saturday morning about eight o’clock the phone would glow, literally because if you’ve got ten friends who do it with, then eight of them are going to call you and they say ‘What are you going to do’ and I’m like ‘What’s he going to do’ he’s going

to do what your friends are going to do and...the same way as you buddy is and so that's a big part of it...

In contrast, Pete and Janet, sports betting participants who live in Las Vegas where sports betting is legal, focused more on motivations centered on the investment opportunity and motivated by a sense of achievement. Janet was typical in describing sports betting with its fixed odds in terms of a return on investment: "I am going to really address myself to putting all of my time, energy, and focus, my extra amount of additional hours I have into sports betting. It's the one with the biggest payoff for the least amount of effort."

On the other hand, card players were motivated to win both for financial gain (e.g., Henry, Saul, Don, Ward), as well as for the challenge of it (Howard, Linda) but still recognized the importance of skill required. For example, Henry summed up his concept of winning purely in terms of financial reward: "I play Texas hold'em...I was playing five days a week and it was paying for a pretty nice house I have up in [an area of Las Vegas]." While Don and others view card games as testing their math skill, Howard and Linda viewed card games as an investment in their future even though Howard admitted to having lost \$3000 dollars in one card game. Participants' beliefs that they could read other card players' hands by various "tells" alluded to a wider belief among participants in their ability to win – based on their beliefs in and understanding of the game. They often talked about how with Texas hold'em they played against others rather than against the house, thus, increasing their odds of winning, especially given the "rubes" they played against, who became more intoxicated as the night wore on.

See Figure 1 for a summary of high-skill gamers versus low-skill gamers, moving from a Hedonic Consumption Theory perspective of play producing a general tendency to gamble to

Motivation Disposition Theory producing one's game choice, with its more individualized perspective, especially focusing on achievement of one's goals and affiliation needs.

Figure 1 about here

Who's in control?

Many slot machine participants had little illusion of control - the casino always won (e.g., Arthur, Elisa, Kacey). When these participants won on a slot machine, they attributed it to luck. As Pat noted about her own sense of stock of luck, "Luck? It's completely random. For me, there's no system. There are no rules. There's no right way or wrong way to play a slot machine you know."

Echoing Darke and Freedman (1997) and indicative of a hot hand, a few slot machine-playing participants attributed their winning to themselves. For example, Jeb believed he could identify a slot machine that would pay out. In a similar vein, Rachel believed in her ability to win by believing she could pick a winning machine, which could have negative consequences if "lucky" wins are attributed to skills and to an illusion of control:

There were certain machines that after you had been there so many times you could tell which were the best machines there, you know...when I first started going to the casinos they had a Harley Davidson bike, some three of them, one on a quarter, one on a fifty cents and one on a dollar machine ...he [Rachel's husband] gave me a fifty dollar bill and I stuck it in and I hit it for four dollars and fifty cents, I won him two Harleys and eleven thousand dollars...

Yet Rachel was the only participant whose illusion of control did not moderate her gambling motivation or gaming choice. Quite simply, she believed her luck would allow her

to win continuously. Her lack of moderation nearly led to the loss of her family business and bankruptcy to cover gambling debts.

While individuals who participated in sports gambling did not talk about luck per se, card players did. Reflecting Keren and Wagenaar's (1985) perspective of poker being 45% luck and 37% skill, Henry stated skill is only a small part of why he wins with much of his winning due to his stock of luck—80% luck. Participants viewed luck as external to the player, such as how the cards were distributed and the chance of getting a good hand. Reminiscent of Heider (1958) and Weiner et al. (1971), Howard noted: "Maybe once a week or once every two weeks...the cards just run in a strange way that a baby could be sitting in the seat and ...[so] long as somebody would turn the cards over for them [the baby would win]."

A key differentiation between luck and skill is that the latter requires some form of gambling strategy (Gupta and Derevensky, 1998). While participants who played slot machines claimed to have no playing strategy (other than favorite machines or times of the day), those participants choosing other gaming choices did. In contrast, Arthur demonstrated both gamblers' fallacy and hot hand, claiming to have developed a "winning strategy" for playing Keno (a low-skilled game), involving selecting lines and particular numbers to play. For more high-skilled games, participants viewed their participation in the activity as one involving the need for education and skill building. For example, David viewed learning about sports betting as developing not only his skills but also his odds of winning. Consider his narrative where his motivation for achievement and power combines with illusion of control within sports gambling:

I did reading on it [sports betting]. I didn't want to be completely uneducated, as far as you can be educated on something you have no control over, in trying to predict

outcomes was like hedging bets, like betting early on a game and the more people bet in a certain way they will change the lines and then you can bet a little, bet in the same way again.

Card players acquired their skills in many ways, such as reading books (e.g., Henry, Saul), trial and error, or reading people's body language (e.g., Howard). Also, one individual (Ward) talked about using his math training and actuarial skills, which allowed him to better assess the probability of various cards appearing.

Participants demonstrated their skills in card playing by actively seeking out games they believed challenged and improved their skills and/or allowed them to win. Interestingly, for these participants the application of skill was often more paramount than just participating in a game. This was particularly evident for a few participants who commented on their online gambling card playing. Consider Ward's narrative where an inability to see online gamers' faces limits him by denying him the opportunity to practice his skills fully:

The big difference is that online you don't get to get visible 'tells' [defined as mannerisms that gives clues to your opponents' cards] on people. A lot of people when they have a really good hand, their body posture shows it and you can pick up on that...and playing online the only strategy is a mathematical part of poker and that's the part I specialize in. It takes away that advantage of knowing the player. You can only play your cards; you cannot really play the other person.

Finally, to what extent did participants' illusion of control moderate their gambling motivation? Besides Rachel, the remaining participants recognized and believed they could control their gambling motivation. Most participants typically moderated their gambling by setting a fixed amount of money they were willing to gamble and lose. For low-skilled

gambling, such as slot machines, many participants set their financial limit. This often took the form of walking away after a certain number of hours when they had reached a break-even point (no loss, no gain) or when their allocated money had been lost. Sports gamblers and card players used a similar approach. Many commented that they could recognize when they were not having a financially rewarding evening and could then simply walk away. However, when they were winning their ability to walk away diminished, in that their illusion of control led them to believe they would continue to win. Winning was too exciting and stimulating to stop. Only when financial losses were incurred did the gambler's illusion of control shatter and cause him or her to stop gambling.

Competitiveness

Among our participants, a key differentiating behavior was competitiveness. While slot machine and sports gambling participants typically relied upon some combination of luck and skill, competing against others was not evident. Indeed, Kacey stressed the importance of sharing her slot machine winnings with whoever was nearby, while others, such as Arthur, were more inclined to 'zone out' into an internally induced sense of numbness. Competing against others was contra to these behaviors. When we probed slot machine participants about their lack of competitiveness, Kacey's response was typical in inferring a lack of belief in having a hot hand:

No, I am not good at them [card games] and I don't want to look like an idiot you know. And I'm always afraid that the guys that are sitting next to me are going 'I wanted their card'. I don't know what you got I just know what I got. I don't want nobody getting mad at me.

Similarly, sports gambling participants saw their gaming choice as a social opportunity to engage with their friends or as a career move. Both choices required advice from fellow

gamblers and they often acted in tandem on their bets rather than against each other. Again, competitiveness would have challenged and threatened the very reason why these participants chose these games. However, among card playing participants, competitiveness was widely evident. Here competitiveness colluded with the participants' perceptions of having a hot hand, producing a heightened level of excitement. For example, Howard was not alone in describing his pleasure in playing Texas hold'em and competing against other challengers rather than against the house, often for up to 24 to 36 hours straight. Combining his playing skills with his need for competitiveness produced a physical response, which similar participants could identify with:

...adrenaline brings it in and the challenge against the other players or it depends on the table stakes of the game, how much money is on the table, and whether you wanna stay there and try to get the majority of it or not. I've been in there with three other people and they all went in and put all their money in the middle and I knew I had the absolute best and that's just a good feeling when you take three people's money.

A key motivation to develop card-playing skills was for the individual to strengthen their hot hand and assert their personal sense of power through winning, thereby achieving a sense of superiority. Thus, these individuals often adeptly applied their psychological skills to understand and ferret out their opponents' 'tells'. As Chuck noted:

...just trying to learn how people play and use their weaknesses against them...the motivation playing there is it's a group of guys who have the skill for face to face interaction...who have been playing and have a pretty good set of skills. It is a challenge and you know if you can beat them, you are doing pretty good.

Who is controlling whom?

What is the key motivator for participants' gambling behaviors? Is it the game itself (i.e., based on a general desire to gamble) or is it reflective of their motives and personal needs, such as escapism or competitiveness needs? Indeed, some participants solely played one game. For example, Ward and Don tended to play card games almost exclusively, while others, such as Mark, Elisa and Kacey, predominately played slots.

Participants' identification with one gaming choice lends itself to gaming choice being a function of which game best allowed individuals to achieve their goals. Quite simply, most participants had one strong game preference and often played it almost entirely. For slot machine players, this gaming choice supported their gaming motivations, typically to escape from the monotony or problems in their lives and to keep stress levels down. Participants felt that the design and play features of the slot machines were important in deciding which machine to play. For example, consider Jeb's justification for playing slot machines compared to cards:

...there is more action [on slot machines] and they have different kinds of music and lights and it's entertaining too. I like the princess machines—they have the animals. I like to see animal pictures on there. I want to feel connected to the stuff, you know?

Sports gambling participants appeared to choose this gaming choice because it reflected their interests and goals. While Janet and Pete saw sports gambling as an investment opportunity with potential for future gains, Howard saw it as a way to challenge himself while supporting his interests. Duane saw it as a way to be sociable. Further, Pete's gaming choice reflected his lifestyle and knowledge as a mixed-martial arts (MMA) fighter:

I've actually trained in this sport. Vegas is like a real hotbed for it. So we probably have like at least 50 decent full-time fighters out of this place that I've either met or trained or watched train. So a lotta of these up and comers they will just sign them but nobody knows about them. The sports books don't know about them so oh yeah, you know, he's an underdog and yet I've seen this guy for a year and I know what he is capable of, so I adjust my bets according to that.

Even the type of sports betting reflected participants' interests, motives and goals. For example, Arthur commented that he preferred betting on football and baseball compared to basketball because he disliked the fast-competitive nature of basketball gambling – 'the scores change quick, quick, quick. You know so, you can bet, but it's like one minute you're up, next minute you are lost.' For others, sports gambling merely facilitated a wider social engagement with friends while increasing the excitement of watching a sport they enjoyed and the teams that they supported.

Participants such as Chuck and Larry also chose games consistent with their competitive nature. These individuals were highly achievement oriented, keen on winning and willing to invest their money, time, and other resources to improve their playing skills. Gaming choice here tended to reflect their beliefs about their abilities to win.

Only a few participants enjoyed multiple games (e.g., Arthur and Janet). While this may suggest that Arthur and Janet's gaming choices are a function of the game, i.e. they like to gamble regardless of what game they play, this inference is not entirely accurate. Even among these participants, each had a gaming preference, which reflected their interests and motivations and largely determined their predominant gaming choice. That is, Arthur favored Keno while Janet favored sports gambling even though both played slot machines and cards, as well.

DISCUSSION

This paper posed three research questions. First, how much is gaming choice a function of a player's desire to gamble, i.e. do people simply choose to gamble or are they drawn to particular games by their personal motives? Second, how do one's perceptions of control temper their motivations to play games involving greater skill and effort compared to games involving more luck than skill? Finally, to what extent can and does an illusion of control moderate a gambler's motivation? That is, to what extent can a gambler recognize and control his/her gambling motivation even when the chance of winning is low? To answer these questions, we drew upon a heuristics perspective and two motivational theories: HDT and MDT. While our findings show that individuals may be motivated to gamble based on an intrinsic motivation of play, consistent with HCT, almost all participants tended to prefer one type of game that reflected some aspect of their individuality or their basic motivational drives (consistent with MDT). Thus, they tended to keep gambling due to their love and preference for a game. Further, these gaming choices also tended to support their heuristic beliefs about gambling. For instance, slot machine players tended to rely on luck and used simple heuristics, such as stock of luck or gambler's fallacy, to guide their actions. On the other hand, players focusing on sports gambling and poker had more nuanced motives and relied more heavily on strategies (based on accumulated knowledge and both actual and perceived skills) beyond simple heuristics. Only a few participants generally enjoyed gambling regardless of their gaming choice.

Regarding the second question, perceived skill manifested itself through an illusion of control, which tempered game choice. Here, gaming choice is central to understanding gambling heuristics and motivations. Individuals who believed that skill development was an important part of achieving better results played and enjoyed games that required greater skill, which

allowed them to test their strategies and theories. They played these games for various reasons as revealed in the findings and as elaborated in Figure 1. On the other hand, individuals who played the slots seldom saw themselves as “in control” but a reliance on heuristics or previously “lucky wins” could produce a false sense of being able to “play skillfully.”

A final question is how a gambler’s illusion of control moderates his or her motivation. A key determinant of how illusion of control moderates a gambler’s behavior lies in the choice of the game and to what the individual attributes success (luck vs. skill). Individuals engaged in low-skill games simply do not expect to win and thus, their illusion of control helps them specify how much money they were willing to lose on slot machines to be entertained. If they leave a winner, they attribute these winnings mostly to luck and view them as a welcome reward. In high-skilled games, a participant’s illusion of control also moderates his or her financial losses, ensuring he or she will quit gambling when s/he reached his or her financial loss limit. However, when high-skilled participants are winning, their illusion of control provides little moderation given that that they feel that their success is partly, and sometimes mostly, attributed to their skill. This suggests then that while illusion of control moderates gambling motivation it differs somewhat for low-versus high-skill gamers.

Applying HCT and MDT to gambling motivations offers new insights into gambling motivations. While both theories are inherently separate – HCT refers to intrinsic motivation focused on play and joy (which seemed to be derived regardless of game type), while MDT refers to an outcome in terms of a desired state or goals. As elaborated in this latter theory, focus tends to be on needs for achievement, affiliation, and power. Clearly, these factors were present among the high-skilled game players, while affiliation was present but achievement (and competition) was almost non-existent in individuals preferring slots. Low-skilled games provide

joy to the participant by offering entertainment and/or escapism, with any financial win often a secondary outcome. For those participants who play more skill-oriented games, joy arises from applying their skills or proving their superiority through competitiveness, challenge, or achievement. HCT's similarity to MDT arises through the idea that what determines one's joy closely resembles one's motives or outcomes viewed from an MDT perspective. For example, a participant who played Texas hold'em wanted a desired state outcome that reaffirmed his skills through competitiveness. By winning, not only did he achieve joy (identifiable with HCT) but also an outcome of power and superiority (associated with MDT). Consequently, we argue that if gaming choice is a function of one's motives and gaming choice lends itself to a desired outcome, then gamblers do not necessarily gamble for the sake of winning but more so because the outcome satisfies a deeper inherent need within them. In other words, participants may be equally motivated to undertake a non-gambling activity if it produces the same desired state outcome. Hence, an individual who thrives on proving his/her skill through competition may do so through card games as equally through some other form of skills-based activity, for example playing games (chess, video games, or other board games) or investing in the stock market. While individuals preferring low-skill games may thrive by engaging in those activities that allow them to play, escape, or socialize in less risky or less competitive activities, for example, riding a roller coaster, swimming, or watching a movie, concert or sports event.

Our paper also makes other contributions. First, by focusing on multiple gaming choices we extend previous research into gambling motivations. By noting that gaming choice is a function of one's personal motives or needs, we identify some motivating variables that extend our knowledge beyond Fang and Mowen (2009), Lam (2007) and Mowen et al.'s (2009) social

interaction and competitive perspective choices, also suggesting that different motivations clearly were related to different game types.

Our findings also offer important managerial and societal contributions. From a managerial perspective, gambling can be associated with various promotional tools that aim to increase brand awareness, influence consumers, or obtain marketing research data. Indeed, Browne et al. (1992) and McDaniel (2002) have identified similarities between those individuals who play promotional games with those with a propensity to gamble. To this research, we offer further managerial contributions. First, marketers should carefully select promotional tools that allude to gambling carefully based on their target audience. Marketers should pay attention to the target audience's motivations, complementing the outcome of the promotion. Hence, for those individuals whose desired outcome from participating is to seek escape, companies can focus these promotions on luck and fun. Promotions like lottery scratch cards would be appropriate here. In contrast, those individuals who are motivated by an outcome based upon winning and competitiveness should focus on promotional games that require some aspect of skill. Competitions featuring complete the sentence or solving cryptic clues may be more appropriate here.

Finally, our research offers a societal contribution. This contribution recognizes the variance based on geography and access to gambling. This is true not only within the United States but also for other cultures and countries. In this paper, we focused on several key gambling centers in the United States, especially Las Vegas. In countries like the United Kingdom, a town may only have one casino, which is perhaps smaller and less grandiose than their American counterparts, and dynamics and choices are likely to be very different. Further, the degree to which gambling is easily available to individuals will strongly affect their gambling behaviors and

game choices. For example, because the respondents in our third study all resided in Las Vegas many of them simply considered gambling to be an easy and convenient recreational activity, with many frequenting their local neighborhood casinos, while others (e.g., Howard and Linda) had clearly been motivated to move to Las Vegas so as “to play with the big boys.” Within the paper, we also noted different motivations appeared to prevail for sports gamblers in legal gambling areas versus the motivations in non-legal gambling areas. Thus, geography, access, regulations, and the glitz and glamour available have a huge impact on both gambling behaviors and motivations. This recognition ultimately may affect how we understand the effect of gambling on society, as well as society’s effect on gamblers.

Further, one of our main takeaways is that high-skill players have higher levels of illusion of control than do low-skill players based on their higher knowledge, and thus greater confidence in their skill and ability to win, whereas low-skill players focus more on the use of various heuristics. However, both sets of players have the potential for negative consequences given that both an illusion of control and reliance on heuristics can produce unrealistic expectations as to one’s ability to win or likelihood of continuing to win once one has begun winning.

It is worth noting that participants’ gaming choice here did not appear heavily predicated on a need to win money, although it was a motivator, but on their beliefs that they could compete based on some combination of skill and luck. This finding is perhaps more problematic considering the rise of Fixed Odds Betting Terminals (FOBTs) which allow players to play electronic versions of casino games, such as poker. In these cases, there is very little “real” skill involved since the players are playing against the house (and a machine) rather than against each other (where skills may be more relevant). With FOBTs increasing in popularity in the United Kingdom, in 2015 individuals spent £1.7billion on FOBTs, a figure that equates to customers

placing a £100 stake every 20 seconds (Mason, 2016). Thus, the illusion of control is fully in operation in these situations and has potentially very negative consequences.

FUTURE RESEARCH AND LIMITATIONS

Our research lends itself to several future research areas. In this paper, we do not attempt to equate one's general needs for achievement, affiliation, or power to one's needs for these goals in gambling. Thus, individuals seeking achievement goals by playing poker do not necessarily seek achievement in all of life's activities or vice versa. That is, some individuals choosing low-skill games may be highly achievement oriented in other domains but may turn to slots simply to escape their everyday stressful life.

Further, differences in motivations across cultures, sub-cultures, or nationalities are areas suitable for future study. Additionally, we do not attempt to differentiate our results based on gender, age, disposable income, education or family life cycle. All of these aspects, as well as other unidentified aspects, can affect both gambling motivations and behaviors and a more intensive study relative to these issues would be useful. Furthermore, future researchers should address how gamblers use heuristics in greater depth since this topic appears to be a very promising area of research.

Finally, proximity to gambling facilities may increase gambling frequency (60 Minutes, 2011). As more states move to legalize and increase gambling options—by adding casinos, lotteries, or online gambling in some form—the issue of proximity's effect on gambling frequency among both recreational and problem gamblers is worth study. Further, when does proximity or other situational factors turn recreational gamblers into problem gamblers?

A number of limitations also lend themselves to future research. While the goal was to focus on several forms of gambling (casino gambling—cards, slots, and sports), as well as sports

gambling outside of casinos, this focus still offers a limited view of gambling activities, with, for example, lotteries offering a potentially different view of motivations. Certainly, hope rather than play is a potential variable of interest here to be examined in future studies. Further, issues of self-report always raise concerns as to the validity of the data. Finally, having used qualitative research to explore and unfold this interesting topic in a very exploratory sense, we encourage others to follow up with quantitative research.

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Table 1
Stage Two Participants

Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Occupation	Predominant gambling choice(s)
Ward	M	23	Cook/Trainee actuary	Poker/online poker
Mark	M	61	Entrepreneur	Slots
Don	M	29	PhD student	Blackjack/poker
David	M	34	Bank President	Blackjack/poker
Greg	M	Mid 40's	Bookie	Sports
Jerry	M	25	Trainee Chiropractor	Online sports
Madge	F	63	Office Assistant	Slots/dogs/sports
Duane	M	52	Bank Vice President	Sports
Julie	F	53	Computer administrator	Slots /blackjack
John	M	31	Owens landscape company	Online sports
Brent	M	23	Production line worker	Sports/blackjack
Rachel	F	56	Unemployed	Slots
Reese	F	38	Hospital employee	Slots
Kim	F	35	Spa owner	Sports
Andy	M	51	Banker	Sports

Table 2
Final Stage: Las Vegas Participants

Pseudonym	Age	Gen	Occupation	Type	Favorite
Donna	27	F	Self-employed	Slot and craps	Slots
Chuck	51	M	Retired military/Sales	Card games	Poker
Saul	40	M	Actor	Texas Hold'em*, video slots & Keno	Poker
Pat	48	F	Comedian	Slots	Slots
Jeb	63	M	Self-employed	Slots & blackjack	Slots
Marcy	49	F	Day care person	Slots and table games	Slots
Henry	75	M	Retired businessman/Part time Actor	Texas Hold'em and roulette	Poker
Susan	43	F	Camera operator	Slots and table games	Slots
Elisa	39	F	Sales	Slots	Slots
Linda	50	F	Retired police officer	Slots and Texas Hold'em	Poker
Howard	49	M	Self-employed	Texas Hold'em	Poker
Kacey	47	F	Self-employed	Slots mostly	Slots
Pete	30	M	Bartender/Airport loader	Sports and card games	Mostly combat sports
Vicki	62	F	Nurse	Slots and Keno	Keno
Arthur	61	M	Former DJ/Self-employed	Sports and Keno	Keno
Larry	42	M	Customer service rep	Sports and Texas Hold'em	Poker
Janet	57	F	Energy healer/Self employed	Sports, video poker, and blackjack	Sports

*Texas Hold'em is a poker-type game

Figure 1
Thematic Overview of Gamblers' Motivations for Game Choice

